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SUBJECT: UNSC OPEN DEBATE ON MIDDLE EAST FOCUSES ON
REVITALIZING PEACE PROCESS AND UNSCR 1701

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¶1. (U) Summary. Recalling recent UNSC focus on Lebanon, UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) Under Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari used a monthly UNSC public debate on the Middle East held on August 22 to call for a renewed international effort to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Gambari urged revived action on the peace process that is "sanctioned and championed by the Council." Arguing that the vision of an independent Palestine and Israel living side by side had "slipped further away during the past year," Gambari ascribed the deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations to the political positions of the parties, the degradation of the PA as a governing institution, continued violence perpetrated by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian groups, as well as the continued establishment of "facts on the ground" that frustrate the realization of a long-term peace.

¶2. (U) Summary, cont'd. The 28 member states -- including the 15 members of the Security Council and other member states who participated the debate -- that took the floor after Gambari, however, addressed both the situation in Lebanon and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While several delegations either characterized Israel's August 19 raid in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley as a "violation" of UNSCR 1701 or called on all parties to exercise "maximum restraint" to avoid any violations, the UK, Denmark, France, Tanzania, Canada, and Argentina joined Ambassador Bolton in calling for respect for the arms embargo established by UNSCR 1701. The UK, France, China, Qatar, and Finland (speaking for the EU), among others, called on Israel to lift its sea and air blockade of Lebanon. While most delegations called for the release of IDF soldiers held in Lebanon and Gaza, the UK, France, China, Russia, France, Japan, Slovakia, and Qatar also called on Israel to release detained Palestinian officials. Israel traded barbs with Syria and Iran, who both lambasted the USG for supporting Israel's military campaign in Lebanon. The Palestinian PR welcomed Gambari's call for Council involvement in the peace process and recalled the Arab League decision to seek a UNSC ministerial during the UNGA. The Syrian PR also endorsed the Arab League's proposal for UNSC action on the peace process, but held out "resistance" as an alternative. End Summary.

¶3. (U) The UNSC held its monthly public debate on the Middle East on August 22. A transcript of the meeting can be found online at www.un.org/news/press/docs/2006/sc8813.doc.htm.

Gambari Focuses Exclusively on Peace Process

¶4. (U) Recalling the SYG's report on the first week of implementation of UNSCR 1701 and the closed UNSC consultations held to discuss the report on August 21 (reftel), U/SYG Gambari said he would focus his remarks instead on developments in the Israeli-Palestinian track over the past year. Noting that the vision of two states living side by side had "slipped further away during the past year," Gambari reported that the SYG had concluded that it was time to consider something more -- a renewed international effort in which the various crises in the region are addressed not in isolation or bilaterally, but as part of a holistic and comprehensive effort, "sanctioned and championed by the Council," to bring peace and stability to the region as a whole. Gambari did not elaborate on the SYG's plans in this regard, nor did he explicitly link it to the Arab League proposal for an SC ministerial.

¶5. (U) Gambari ascribed the deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations to four factors. First, the political position of the parties, including Hamas's unwillingness to accept the principles that underpin the peace process as well as Israel's refusal to transfer USD 500 million in tax revenue owed to the PA and its continued settlement activity. Second, the degradation of the PA caused in part by revenue shortfalls and Israeli movement restrictions, which helped ensure a "mixed" PA performance in Gaza since Israel's disengagement. Third, continuing death and destruction caused by IDF military operations in the occupied territories and Qassam rocket fire from Gaza into Israel as well as the PA's inability to secure the release of abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Fourth, Gambari lamented "facts on the ground" such as Israeli settlement activity, the separation barrier, and the closure of the Rafah crossing

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between Gaza and Israel.

Ambassador Bolton Emphasizes Arms Embargo

¶6. (U) During his intervention, Ambassador Bolton emphasized that the arms embargo established in UNSCR 1701 against arms transfers to Lebanon not authorized by the GOL must be strictly observed. He expressed concern about the attitudes of Syria and Iran, whose leaders had repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel, and noted that the burden of abiding by the arms embargo fell especially on them. It was essential, he argued, to put an end to Hizballah operating as a state within a state to achieve the goal of a lasting peace in the region. He cautioned that the international community must not apply only a temporary band-aid solution to the problem and allow Hizballah to regroup and re-arm. Recalling UNSCR 1701's call for an unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers, Ambassador Bolton also averred that it was impossible to divorce this issue from the need for an end to violence. Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ambassador Bolton castigated the Hamas-led PA government for its failure to govern responsibly and for continuing to reject peace and embrace terrorism. He noted the USG's decision to increase humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians to USD 270 million, including more than USD 50 million for UNRWA's emergency appeal.

Violations of UNSCR 1701 / Arms Embargo

¶7. (U) Several delegations, including Argentina, Peru, Qatar, Ghana, and Norway, explicitly characterized Israel's August 19 raid in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley as a "violation" of UNSCR 1701's call for a cessation of hostilities. France noted that the August 19 raid was a "source of serious concern" but otherwise declined to characterize the incident. Other countries, including France, Denmark, Japan, Slovakia,

Finland (speaking for the EU), and Brazil, called on all parties to exercise "maximum restraint" to avoid any violations of UNSCR 1701.

¶18. (U) The UK, Denmark, France, Tanzania, Canada, and Argentina joined Ambassador Bolton in calling for adherence to the arms embargo in UNSCR 1701. Calling on all parties to respect UNSCRs 1559, 1680, and 1701, the UK singled out "the key provision of UNSCR 1701 that ensures an end to all arms shipments other than for the GOL." Denmark highlighted the importance of ensuring that UNIFIL is given authority to enforce the arms embargo, while Canada tied respect for the arms embargo to the ultimate goal of ensuring Hizballah's disarmament.

Calls on Israel to Lift Blockade

¶19. (U) As they had done during closed consultations on August 21 (reftel), the UK, France, China, and Ghana called on Israel to lift its air and sea blockade of Lebanon to allow humanitarian relief efforts to proceed. Tanzania, Ghana, Finland (speaking for the EU), Pakistan, and Argentina supported this call. Qatar, which described the continuing blockade as a violation of UNSCR 1701, called on the UNSC to take action to ensure that Israel lifts the blockade immediately.

Release IDF and Palestinian Prisoners

¶10. (U) Most delegations called for the release of the IDF soldiers held in Gaza and Lebanon, although not all used the terms "immediate and unconditional." China, for example, called for the "early" release of the IDF soldiers, while Russia did not explicitly mention the IDF captives at all. Several delegations, including China, Russia, France, Japan, Slovakia, Qatar, and Congo, called for the release of Palestinian officials arrested by Israel. The UK called on Israel to either charge or release these Palestinian detainees, while Denmark and Greece expressed concern about these arrests. France characterized these arrests "counter-productive" and called on Israel to immediately free detained Palestinian politicians. Several delegations referred to language from UNSCR 1701 to highlight the need to "settle" the issue of Lebanese prisoners in Israel.

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Israel Trades Barbs With Syria and Iran

¶11. (U) Characterizing Hamas, Hizballah, Iran, and Syria as the "quartet of terror," Israel warned of "catastrophic" consequences if Iran and Syria were allowed to succeed in their efforts to re-supply Hizballah. It called on UNIFIL to deploy to Lebanon's ports and its border with Syria to ensure implementation of the arms embargo. Referring to reports of Syrian and Iranian training of Hizballah fighters, Israeli PR Gillerman averred that the embargo also demands an end to interference by those countries in Lebanon. Gillerman also urged UNSC members to ensure that their resolutions -- including 1559, 1690, and 1701 -- were fully implemented and to fulfill their responsibility to work for the release of captured IDF soldiers.

¶12. (U) The Palestinian representative to the UN, Riyad Mansour, spoke at length about the impact of Israeli actions on the Palestinian population. He also embraced Gambari's proposal for Council action, seeking SC focus on the Palestinian situation analogous to its recent attention to Lebanon. Mansour also recalled the decision of the Arab League to seek an SC ministerial on the peace process during the UNGA.

¶13. (U) Iran and Syria joined Lebanon and the Palestinian

observer in criticizing Israel for its purported crimes against humanity and for violating UNSCR 1701. But the Iranian and Syrian representatives went further by specifically blaming the USG for joining in Israel's alleged effort to destroy Lebanon. The Iranian representative referred to U.S. media reports to suggest that the USG and Israel had "pre-cooked a plan to transform a border shoot-out into a war." Characterizing Israeli and USG claims about the IDF's August 19 raid as "preposterous," he argued that the operation was planned to "abduct" Lebanese officials. The Syrian PR, calling Israel "the demon of international terrorism," quoted SARG President al-Asad's remark that if peace is not an option, resistance becomes the only alternative. He endorsed the Arab League proposal for the UNSC to take action to revive the Middle East Peace Process and also called on the UNSC to address the issue of Israel's nuclear capability.

BOLTON